

Building and Sustaining a Culture of Belonging

Researchers have reported students' sense of belonging has been strikingly low internationally, even before the COVID-19 pandemic. Creating the conditions for students to experience a sense of belonging and feel fully affirmed in who they are is the best way for teachers to personalize any instruction in any context.

In this webinar, we will:

- explore activities and practices to build relationships in a language class context that affirms students' identities and improves students' sense of belonging
- develop an action plan to regularly use at least one relationship-building strategy in our instruction



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Lindsay Lyons



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She has taught multilingual learners in New York City public schools, holds a PhD in Leadership and Change, and is the founder of the educational blog and podcast, *Time for Teachership*.



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A Culture of Belonging...

What is that?

All students (and teachers) are:

- Appreciated and celebrated for who they are.
- Connected to and supported by adults and other students at school.

Students (and teachers) do **NOT**:

- Need to defend their human rights.
- Feel unsafe at school.



Let's Hear from You!



Why do YOU think a culture of belonging is important in an ELT class?

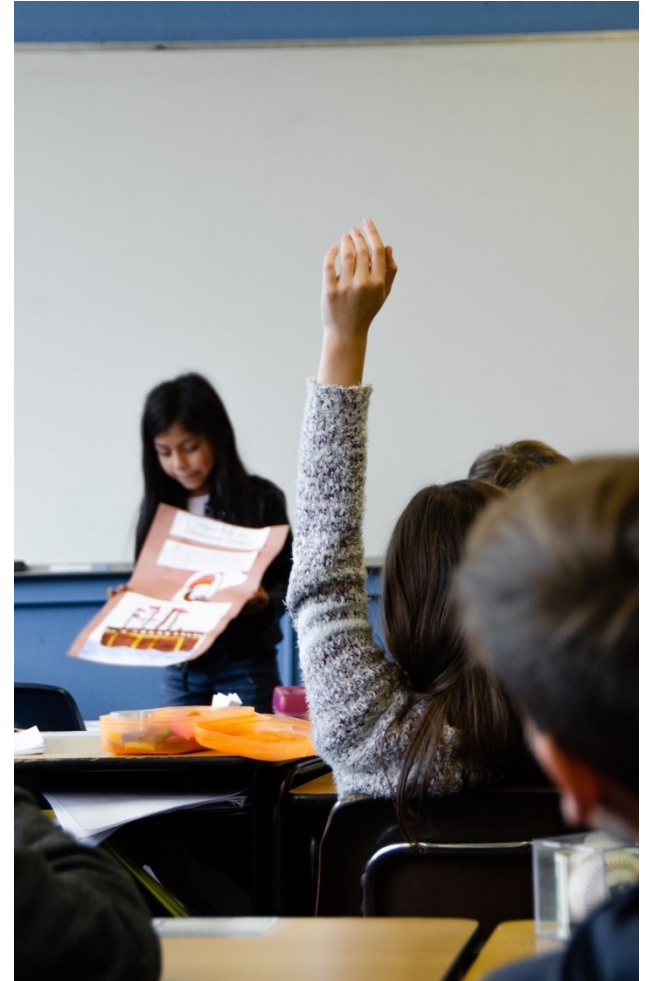


A Culture of Belonging...

Why is it important in an ELT class?

We learn by:

- Talking to each other
- Sharing ideas
- Making mistakes
- Taking risks by experimenting with new language



In this session, we will...



...explore strategies to co-create class agreements.



...explore whole-class activities to build relationships with students.



...plan for how to regularly use one strategy into your instruction.

Let's Practice!

Human Thermometer Activity

How much do you agree or disagree with this statement?

I regularly use relationship-building activities in class.

(Examples: asking students about their weekend or how they feel about a story)



DISAGREE

AGREE

Where would you stand on this line? Why?

Let's Practice!

Human Thermometer Activity

How much do you agree or disagree with this statement?

I have time to build relationships during class.



DISAGREE

AGREE

Where would you stand on this line? Why?

Let's Practice!

Human Thermometer Activity

How much do you agree or disagree with this statement?

My students talk (or engage in student-led activity) for at least 75% of each class.



DISAGREE

AGREE

Where would you stand on this line? Why?

A Culture of Belonging...

How might class members feel?

- **Teachers feel:** Trust, Curiosity, Hope, Success, Joy, Peace, Effective
- **Students feel:** Pride, Effective, Joy, Love, Connection, Curiosity, Peace



A Culture of Belonging...

What might it look and sound like?

- Student interests inform what and how they will learn
- Students share what could be different about the lesson
- **Teachers and students talk about students' strengths**
- **Co-creating and referencing class agreements**



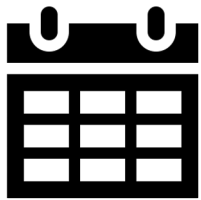
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If you're used to giving the rules...

Research shows when students help make class decisions, they experience:

- A greater sense of **belonging**
- Better **grades**
- Better **relationships** with teachers and other students
- Better **mental health**

Start Small!

*Ask students to describe a time a conversation did NOT go well.
“What ‘rules’ could have made it better?”*

Share your ideas and ask for student feedback.


Co-Create Class Agreements

When can I do this?

- Start of the year
- Before trying your first class discussion
- The next class discussion after a prior discussion did not go well
- Anytime! (It's never too late.)

What's the physical product?

- A poster on the wall



When someone breaks the agreement, you can point to the poster and reference the “rule” number.

How often to check in?

- Review at the start of each class discussion

Co-Create Class Agreements [SAMPLE]

We want: Everyone to feel they belong in our class.

Sample Agreements for “When We Disagree”

- Ask: “What do you mean by that?”
- If your words hurt someone, apologize.
- When you feel big emotions:
 - Pause: think of a word, color, or sound that describes how you feel.
 - Take a deep breath and count to 5 before acting.

Getting Agreement

“Fist to Five”

0. These are really bad.

1. These are bad.

2. I need to make some changes before I can agree.

3. I can live with it.

4. These are good.

5. These are really good!



Below 3: No agreement; talk it out.



Strategies to Co-Create Agreements

Circle

- Sit in a circle.
- Use a talking piece to take turns sharing aloud.



Write Around

- Respond to guiding questions on chart paper.
- Pass to next group.
- Continue until all groups get all questions.

**What will we do if someone
is upset during class?**

Group 1:

Say sorry

Group 2:

Talk it out

Strategies to Co-Create Agreements

Chat Waterfall (Virtual)

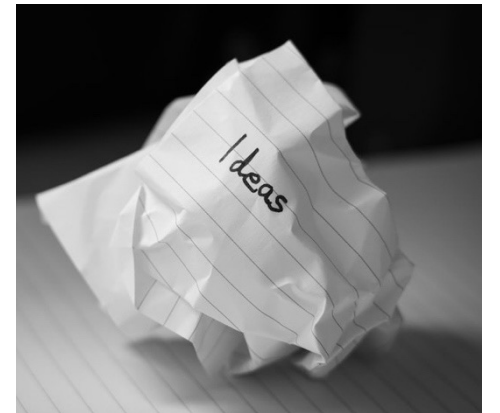
- All type ideas in chat. Don't hit ENTER until directed.
- All press ENTER at once.



Smash It

- Write idea on paper.
- Crumple the paper; toss it.
- A volunteer unfolds papers and writes all ideas on board.

Adaptation
Fold It (and Pass It)



Let's Hear from You!



*Which strategy do you like best for
co-creating agreements in YOUR class?*



Let's Hear from You!



*Do you have any questions or worries
about using these strategies?*



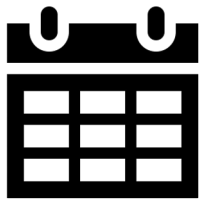
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...plan for how to regularly use one strategy into your instruction.

Quality Teacher-Student Relationships Improve...

- Student attendance, engagement, and academic achievement (Quin et al., 2016)
- *Teacher* job satisfaction (O'Shea, 2021)



Let's Hear from You!



***What whole-class activities do YOU
already use to build relationships
with students?***



Resource: Values in Action

Character Traits

Use to Build Vocabulary

- Introduce one category each week (6 total)
- Use words as you point out what students are doing well



Image by L. Lyons: inspired by content from www.viacharacter.org

Resource: Values in Action

Character Traits

Use to help students learn about themselves and others.

- Appreciation boards or notes
- Character analysis
- Survey + reflection questions on website



Image by L. Lyons: inspired by content from www.viacharacter.org

Activity: Circle (Steps)

- Everyone sits in a circle (teacher too)
- Set up a centerpiece
- *Opening ceremony*
- Ask a question. Students pass the talking piece. (Can say “Pass.”)
 - Only speak with talking piece (teacher, too)
- *A closing ceremony*

Adaptation:

Stand in a circle



Activity: Circle

Use regularly! I had a weekly circle in my classes.

“Values” Appreciation circle

What word can you use to describe the person standing to your left?

Why did you choose that word?
(What did they do this week?)



Image by L. Lyons: inspired by content from www.viacharacter.org

Activity: Circle

Storytelling circle

- “Story of My Name”

My name means...
I like my name because...
The person who gave me my name is...

- A time when I demonstrated
“x” value or character trait

I showed kindness when...
*The character trait that best describes me
is _____ because...*

Activity: Circle

Academic circle

- Invite opinions
- Ask students to make a connection to:
 - Personal experience
 - Stories or events in the news (e.g., in the world, in the past, in the community)
 - Another text (book, song, movie)
 - Another class (Science, Math, Social Studies...)



Build relationships AND content knowledge at the same time!

Let's Hear from You!



*Which strategy do you like best for
building relationships in YOUR class?*

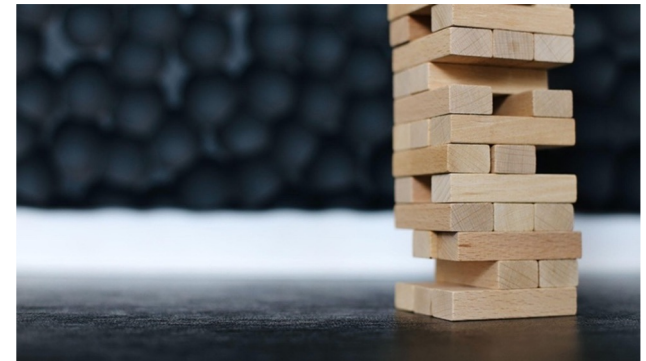


Plan for Healthy Conflict Resolution

BONUS STRATEGY!

Restorative Conversation: You facilitate.
Participants use a talking piece.

- *What happened?*
- *How did you feel? (Or, What did you need that you weren't able to get?)*
- *Who was affected?*
- *How can this situation be repaired?*



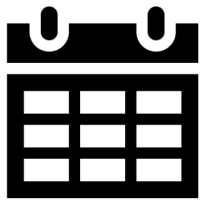
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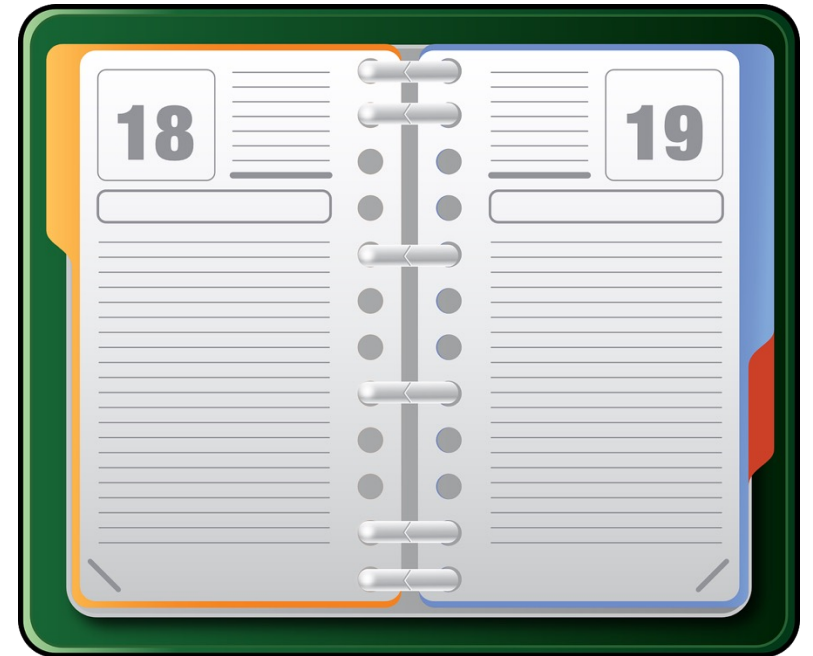


...plan for how to regularly use one strategy into your instruction.

Tip #1

Put it on the calendar.

- Right now, pick a date or lesson to start.
- Create a daily or weekly “arc” of activities.
 - Mondays: Circles to discuss text
 - Fridays: Values Appreciation notes



Tip #2

“Strategy Stack”

- Pair one of these activities with something you already do.



Examples:

- Discuss text → Circle format
- Character/plot analysis → Values in Action
- Group work disagreement → Restorative conversation

If Prioritizing Belonging is a Big Shift...

Author James Clear talks about linking our habits to our identities as a way to make sure we follow through on our goals.

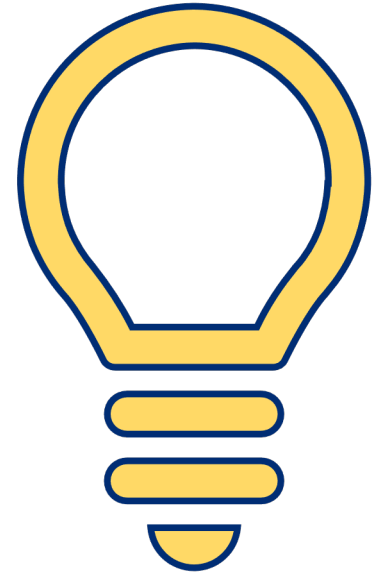
I adapted some of his reflection questions for us as teachers:

- **What values (character traits) do I want to have as a teacher?**
- **How am I teaching with those values right now?**
- **How can I teach with those values in the future?**

Clear says this helps him “revisit my desired identity and consider how my habits are helping me become the type of person I wish to be.”

Culture of Belonging Strategy Recap

- **Co-Create Class Agreements**
 - Circle
 - Smash It
 - Chat Waterfall
 - Write Around
- **Build Relationships Regularly**
 - Values in Action (appreciation activity, character analysis)
 - Circle
- **Bonus: Plan for Healthy Conflict Resolution**
 - Restorative Conversation



Let's Hear from You!



What's your plan?

- WHICH STRATEGY will you regularly use in your instruction?
- HOW will you do it?

Strategy Recap

Co-Create Class Agreements

(Circle, Write Around, Smash It, Chat Waterfall)

Build Relationships

(Values in Action—appreciation activity or character analysis, Circle)

Resolve Conflict

Restorative Conversation

We did it!



...explore strategies to co-create class agreements.



...explore whole-class activities to build relationships with students.



...plan for how to regularly use one strategy into your instruction.



References

- Quin, D. (2017). Longitudinal and contextual associations between teacher–student relationships and student engagement: A systematic review. *Review of Educational Research*, 87(2), 345-387.
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- Clear, J. (2018). *Atomic habits: An easy & proven way to build good habits & break bad ones*. Avery.

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Thank you!

Questions or concerns?

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Reflection Questions

1. What activities do you use at the beginning, middle, or end of class to create or strengthen student-to-student or student-teacher relationships?
2. How might you “strategy stack” by combining relationship-building ideas from the webinar with your existing curriculum content?
3. Do you “check in” with yourself to compare how your teaching practices relate to your teaching ideals and personal values?
4. How might you incorporate routines or time management strategies to embed relationship-building practices in your classroom?



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